

#

Duxbury Clipper, Wednesday, July 3, 1996



## Books and Bob Hale

When Charlotte Horner called me at my office in New York City to seek advice, saying she had decided after 10 years to sell Westwinds Bookshop, I told her I would drop in during my next visit to Duxbury. Which I did. There wasn't much left. Shifting tides had reduced it to a few books on mostly empty shelves.

The timing was perfect, however. I had been airborne more than half my waking hours for 7 years, 5 of them as associate executive director plus 2 as president of American Booksellers Assn. I was ready to land. Before that I had run Hathaway House Bookshop in Wellesley for 8 years and Connecticut College Bookshop the previous 8 years. It was time to come home.

Charlotte and I reached an agreement -- which confounded professional colleagues who said there was nothing to buy -- but there was -- a name. It was important that Westwinds survive and eventually thrive.

While I was talking with Charlotte, Gracia Wrye walked in, slammed a rental book down on the counter, looked me in the eye and said, "Worst book I ever read. You know what I like, pick out something for me to read." I chose a book for her and she left, returning a megasecond later jaw agape. "What are you doing here?" It was as if I'd never been away.

Walking past the fish market to my car I met an old friend and told her I'd just bought Westwinds. She blinked, "For a hobby, I hope." My wife's reaction was more to the point. "How will we eat?"

That was a quandary because I knew Westwinds would require large infusions of cash and no withdrawals for quite awhile. I signed a couple of ghost writing contracts which are more lucrative than most other kinds, and scheduled lots of lectures throughout New England and the Southeast. On the first day I owned Westwinds Bookshop, sales totaled \$9. Sentiment aside, I wondered if I'd made a terrible mistake.

To fill the shelves until I could restock inventory, I brought in cartons of my own books, which made some people think I was going into the used book business, but not for long. Incredibly there was an almost instant response by Duxbury residents. What I didn't have, and I didn't have much, I said I would get within a couple of days -- which I accomplished by running up to New England Mobile Bookfair, and very soon by ordering from Ingram Book Co., a superb national wholesaler. Christmas came 7 weeks after I assumed ownership, and already the tide seemed to be turning.

What happened in the next 8 years, forcing a move from Snug Harbor to Duxbury Market Place and then a second move into much larger quarters is due primarily to the amazing support of book buyers in and around Duxbury who obviously wanted Westwinds to succeed. It wasn't at all unusual for customers to come in saying, "I saw a book at Barnes & Noble which I'd like. If you don't have it would you order it for me?" That is astounding loyalty to a local business.

Next week, I'll wrap up this meandering tale.



Duxbury Clipper, Wednesday, July 10, 1996

## Books and Bob Hale

The rapid expansion of Westwinds Bookshop between 1983 and 1990 happened because of enthusiastic public response and the assistance of capable associates, Mark Provost, Francis Wyman, and Ann Harris, each of whom felt as strongly as did I about the quality of book store Duxbury should have. An old maxim, getting the right book to the right person at the right time, provides enough joy for a real bookseller to offset the headaches of a small business.

However, the endeavors I began to support my family while I played at being a bookseller also expanded during those years, forcing me to make a decision. I would have to give up both writing and lecturing and devote full time to Westwinds if it was to continue on its path of healthy growth, or I would have to give up Westwinds. My wife and my accountant were of the opinion I had no choice.

At about this time, Nancy Blake, who had long expressed the desire to have her own bookstore, reminded me that she had attended a booksellers school and felt she was ready to switch from being a scientist to becoming a business woman. A deal was struck, and on July 1, 1990 Westwinds began the next chapter in its history.

In 1946 when Margaret Metcalf created Westwinds in her barn on Washington St., she did all the right things -- put lots of fine books on the shelves and hired intelligent people to serve customers in an attractive setting. When Nancy Blake bought the business in 1990 it was necessary to not only have those essential ingredients of dedication to serving the book needs of one's clientele and an inventory of books reflecting the interests of that clientele, but also an ability to come up with such things as a Frequent Buyer Card, category discounts, etc., to keep customers coming who might otherwise be lured away by the wiles of increasingly unpleasant competition.

I have been part of bookselling for almost as long as Westwinds has existed. For more than 20 of those years I taught bookselling in seminars all over the country and at the Radcliffe Publishing Procedures Course. I stopped teaching when I could no longer instill in students the optimism needed to be an independent bookseller in the face of chain superstore wars underwritten by publishers who are forced by sheer numbers to give in to their demands.

B. Dalton charges publishers \$12,000 a month to display a title in the front of their stores, Barnes & Noble charges \$10,000. Publishers pay these chains and Borders between \$1,500 and \$3,000 a month per title to have it placed face out in a "new arrivals" section. End of aisle displays in Border's children's department cost publishers \$7,900 per title per month. (These figures have been reported in many publications, including the Authors Guild Bulletin.) It is such subsidies that allow chain stores to sell books at a "discount," an option not open to independent booksellers.

Westwinds has had high points and low during its half-century of existence. That it is thriving in the summer of 1996, thanks to those who support it and the hard work of those who run it, is considered by many to be just short of miraculous. Margaret Carter Metcalf would be pleased.